



Justice Center for the Protection of People With Special Needs

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Contact: [Bill Reynolds](#) (518) 414-1299 (Justice Center)
Mark McCracken (518) 210-5238 (Schenectady PD)

Justice Center Provides Training to Schenectady Police Department on Appropriate Responses to Incidents Involving People with Special Needs

The NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center) has been conducting disability awareness training sessions for members of the Schenectady Police Department, as part of the Justice Center's ongoing mission to provide useful information to law enforcement partners who are called upon to respond to incidents involving people with special needs.

"It's important for officers to know how to respond to a call involving a person with a disability," said Justice Center Executive Deputy Director Jay Kiyonaga. "If a person is not responding or cooperating with an officer it does not necessarily mean that he or she is intentionally disregarding the instructions. The person may not be able to hear or speak – or may simply be afraid. We train officers on what to do in situations that may require split second decision making and provide them the tools they need to distinguish between criminal behavior and non-criminal conduct by people with disabilities."

Kiyonaga added that with training, officers can understand what the situation calls for, that the individual with whom they are dealing may simply require calming time. The individual could simply be afraid of an officer's uniform. An officer who is better informed about the individual will be appropriately prepared to provide assistance to the individual and interview witnesses of the incident.

Schenectady Assistant Police Chief Jack Falvo, Jr. said, "This training is helping us solve very real challenges and issues in our communities, providing us additional tools to help us understand what needs to be done to protect people with special needs. The instruction we are receiving will be a tremendous resource for our department and law enforcement in general."

In addition to instructing officers on how to respond to calls, officers are also trained to identify and understand the various characteristics of disabilities, together with the appropriate response, the role of care givers and providers, challenging scenarios and behaviors, current trends regarding people with developmental disabilities, the

Americans with Disabilities Act, interaction skills and applicable techniques for interviewing people with disabilities who may be victims of abuse.

The training sessions also educate participants on the role of the Justice Center and how the agency collaborates with State Police, local law enforcement agencies and district attorneys to investigate and prosecute criminal cases involving individuals who receive services.

The Justice Center and its statewide hotline and incident reporting system began operations on June 30, 2013. It is staffed 24-hours a day, seven days a week by trained professionals who receive reports of allegations of abuse and neglect of people with special needs. Once a report is received by its Vulnerable Persons Central Register (VPCR) Hotline, it is logged and assessed. Serious cases of abuse or neglect are assigned to the Justice Center's investigation team or, when appropriate, to a local law enforcement agency for follow-up.

The Justice Center also maintains a statewide registry of all persons who have been found to be responsible for serious or repeated acts of abuse and neglect. Once placed on the registry, known as the "Staff Exclusion List" or SEL, they are prohibited by law from ever working again with people with disabilities or special needs.

The Justice Center has jurisdiction over six state agencies: the Office of Mental Health (OMH) the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Department of Health (DOH), the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) and the State Education Department (SED).

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